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B: 3 Inches



Length, 6 Feet 4 Inches

DESCRIPTION of an ANCIENT IRISH INSTRUMENT,
*presented to the Royal Irish Academy by the Right Honourable
 Lord Viscount DILLON, M. R. I. A. extracted from his Lord-
 ship's Letter on the Subject to the Right Honourable the Earl of
 CHARLEMONT, President, and from an Account of the same
 Instrument by RALPH OUSLEY, Esq; M. R. I. A. Communicated
 to the Committee of Antiquities by JOSEPH COOPER WALKER,
 Esq; M. R. I. A. Secretary.*

THIS instrument is supposed by Mr. Ousley to have been a species of trumpet, called in the old Irish tales and romances *Benwownen*, *Barr-vaill*, and *Buadb-vaill*, which last name signifies mouth-piece of victory; he is informed that a trumpet of this name is mentioned in the Pfalter of Cashel, but not described. It is made of a light fine-grained wood, probably willow; is six feet four inches long; the wider end measures three inches and a quarter diameter, from whence it gradually tapers to a point at the other end, where he supposes a mouth-piece to have been fixed.

Read Dec.
17, 1791.

THE manner in which it was formed was very rude. It seems to have been originally a solid piece, which in that state was split from end to end; each of the pieces into which it was thus divided was then awkwardly hollowed or grooved at the inside, semicircularly, and tapering, in such a manner that when joined again, these grooves, applying to each other, formed a circular and conical perforation through the whole length, resembling that of a trumpet or horn. To secure the pieces in this position they were bound together on the outside by a long fillet of thin brass, about an inch and quarter broad, lapped round them in a spiral, from one end to the other, with upwards of an inch of interval between the rolls, and fastened to the wood with small brass nails. The ends were secured by circular plates, probably of the same metal, as appears from marks still remaining on the surface of the wood, these pieces having been lost.

THIS brass filletting deserves some attention:—Its breadth is not equal throughout, being in some parts a third greater than in others; its edges, though in general nearly straight, are not so evenly defined as to give the idea of its having been cut from a broader piece of sheet brass, nor do they bear any marks of having been dressed or touched by any kind of tool or instrument of grinding; they exhibit, on the contrary, in some parts, that sort of lightly undulating and rounded outline on both sides, that might naturally be produced by flattening or extending a rod or piece of brass sufficient to give this breadth of plate and no more: this seems not to have been done

done by strokes, both surfaces being very smooth, and shewing no appearance of indentures or impressions of blows; and the thickness, which is about equal to that of the best writing-paper, being nearly uniform:—It seems rather to have been effected by powerful pressure, as by that of a very heavy body with a smooth surface; but it appears that this pressure was not perfectly equal at all times or in all parts; for though the thickness is more equable than would probably have resulted from hammering, it is not as completely so as if it had passed through a flattening mill, or been worked by any kind of regular mechanical operation.

THIS binding is at present in four pieces; but it may have been broken by the country people that made the discovery; for, supposing it to be gold, they stripped the whole of it from the wood; but when convinced of their mistake, they fastened it on again with common pins. The brass has the same colour and appearance in every respect as that now in use, and has suffered very little corrosion.

THE instrument was found in the month of August 1791, on the lands of Becan, in the barony of Costello, and county of Mayo, part of the estate of Lord Viscount Dillon. It lay horizontally, buried in the body of a turf-bog, at the depth of about nine feet from the surface. When taken up it was perfectly straight, but has since warped somewhat in drying. The wood is still very sound.

MR. OUSLEY thinks it impossible to assign any exact age to this instrument, but supposes it at least previous to the settlement of the English in this island, as no such thing is mentioned by Cambrensis, or any other author that has written of the affairs of Ireland since that period. Lord Dillon concludes, from the great accumulation of bog over it, that it must be presumed to have lain in the situation where it was found many ages; and this is further confirmed by the great rudeness of its contrivance and workmanship, particularly of the wooden part, which seems strongly to support its claim to remote antiquity. The old Irish tales, Mr. Ousley observes, mention the *Benworwen* or *Buabbal* as a military instrument of music, used only on emergencies, and capable of producing a most tremendous sound, which might be heard to the distance of seven miles, and whose effects on all animals within the reach of its blast are described in very exaggerated terms; and Mr. O'Halloran, p. 363 of his Introduction to the Antiquities of Ireland, mentions the *Buabbal* as a well-known military clarrion. Indeed this word is used at this day in the Irish language to denote a horn. Still, however, it must remain to be determined whether this may be considered as one of the instruments known by these names.